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SOME ARE UPSET WITH DOE RUN OFFER OUTSIDE BUYOUT AREA, THEY WONDER IF THEIR SAFETY IS BEING DISREGARDED*St. Louis Post Dispatch, Sunday, March 24, 2002*

Chris Carroll

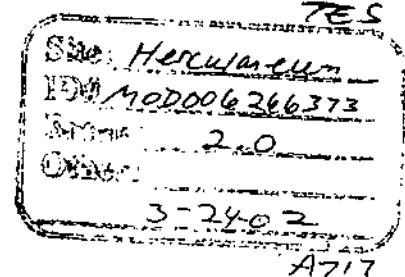
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Herculanum resident Eve Rhodes briefly was excited when she heard late Thursday that Doe Run Co. plans to buy 160 houses on contaminated ground in the shadow of the nation's largest lead smelter.

Then she realized her house was not included.

Her family, including a 4-year-old boy who had lead poisoning, is living at government expense in a Festus hotel waiting for Doe Run to decontaminate their house on Thurwell Street inside and out.

Thurwell is just outside a buyout zone negotiated in a six-hour meeting Thursday between Doe Run and state officials. Rhodes, her husband and children will return to their house within weeks.

"They're saying it's so dangerous that they've got to get the kids out just a block away from us, but my kids have to stay," she said. "This has me constantly on the verge of tears."

State health and environmental officials say the buyout area has the highest rate of children with lead poisoning. However, other nearby areas have a greater number of young children. The rate of lead poisoning in the buyout area is higher than 50 percent.

Officials promise to keep other children safe through a vigorous cleanup effort combined with expanded environmental monitoring.

But some outside the buyout zone -- but still within range of lead and other toxic fallout from the Doe Run smelter -- wonder whether their health and safety have been disregarded.

Missouri Gov. Bob Holden was in Herculanum on Saturday to meet with local officials and tour the polluted city.

He said Doe Run has told the state it would begin on Monday arranging immediate buyouts of 26 families with children under 6 years old -- the group most at risk from lead. The company expects to buy 134 additional houses within the next two years. But it has yet to announce a buyout schedule.

Holden has called the buyout agreement a "win-win situation" in which children most at risk from smelter operations are protected, while more than 200 jobs and tax revenues are saved from a possible shutdown of the smelter because of environmental problems.

Herculanum Alderman Leslie Warden, 1st Ward, is a resident of the buyout zone and a longtime, vocal critic of Doe Run. She agrees with Holden's assessment of the buyout up to a point.

"I support it," she said. "It's a long overdue first step. However, I don't believe all the people who are impacted and potentially will be impacted in the future have been addressed by this plan."

A map of Herculaneum that the federal Environmental Protection Agency provided to the Post-Dispatch shows that the majority of contaminated properties where young children live are outside the buyout zone.

The map documents soil contamination levels at properties throughout most of the city and shows houses where young children lived when experts tested the soil late last year.

The soil at most of the houses with young children has been replaced, but residents have said they fear recontamination will occur, leaving their children in danger.

Eve Rhodes' street, Thurwell, had eight houses with young children - a higher concentration of youngsters than any area within the buyout zone. Each house had enough lead in its yard to exceed federal safety guidelines when tested in October.

The federal map also shows about 30 other houses with young children outside the buyout area.

Another woman who lives on Thurwell said she doesn't understand why her family was left out.

"It's great for the ones who live the closest, but they're not the only ones that need to get out of here," said Sandie Wren, who says she worries about long-term effects of lead on her 8-year-old daughter. "I guess I disagree with the plan overall, because I think they should offer buyouts to anyone with kids, wherever they live in town."

State officials vow to redouble their efforts to prevent poisoning of children outside the buyout zone.

The properties nearest the smelter and slag pile had the highest contamination levels and were the No. 1 priority, said Stephen Mahfood, director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

Elsewhere, state and federal agencies will insist that Doe Run vigorously clean up the area, he said. The company is under a strict emissions reduction requirement that could be enforced through smelter production curtailment or a possible shutdown if not met.

In addition, Mahfood said, the state and federal governments are beginning monthly soil and interior house dust monitoring to check whether houses and yards of people outside the buyout zone are being recontaminated.

"I assure you, if we do not see decreases in actual blood-lead levels and decreases in the amount of lead being deposited in the soil, we're going to go right back to the table" with Doe Run to seek additional concessions, Mahfood said.

Jeff Zelms, Doe Run's president and chief executive officer, in a statement on Friday questioned the scientific basis of the buyout. But he said the company wants to respond to the fears of residents.

"The Doe Run Co. believes the acquisition of property surrounding the smelter in Herculaneum will alleviate many concerns of people in the community and the company is willing to step up and help in this situation," Zelms said.

State officials said they are beefing up air-quality monitoring in Herculaneum, with round-the-clock monitoring to begin soon. In the past, monitoring occurred intermittently, and some residents charged that Doe Run tailored its production schedule to minimize pollution on monitoring days.

PHOTO, MAP

(1) Color photo by LAURIE SKRIVAN / POST-DISPATCH - Jesse Miller, 4, plays at his house on Thurwell Street in Herculaneum this month. The house is outside the area where Doe Run Co. plans to offer buyouts. "I am happy for the kids that are getting out, but they are not my kids," said Jesse's mother, Carol Miller. "I am disappointed. My kids are still at risk."< (2) Map by the Post-Dispatch - Doe

Run Buyout Zone

Children who lived closest to the nation's largest lead smelter in Herculaneum had the highest incidence of lead poisoning, according to a Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services survey. The Survey reported that 56 percent of children who lived within a quarter-mile radius of Doe Run Co.'s smelter had elevated blood-lead levels. The survey, conducted last year, also reported that 52 percent of the children who lived from one-fourth mile to one-half mile from the smelter had high lead levels.

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